

This has been a devastating year for the Texas Cowboys. While it pales in comparison to the pain his family continues to experience, our organization is still reeling with the loss of our friend and brother, Nicky Cumberland. This has been an experience which no student, parent, or friend should ever have to endure. It will forever mark our time at The University, and our organization is committed to doing what we can to salvage some good from this horrific tragedy.

Immediately following the accident that claimed Nicky's life, our judiciary board launched a third-party investigation into the events that transpired that night. The investigation found that the events that took place at the retreat were not responsible for the tragedy that took place that morning. No alcohol or any form of hazing contributed in any way to the accident. At the retreat, no member was forced to stay up, nor were they intentionally deprived of sleep. In fact, some members, including New men, went to bed early, in order to return to campus for other activities the next morning. Many of our members chose to stay up late bonding with one another, as is common at these types of retreats. Before the retreat had begun, the group involved in the accident notified Cowboys leadership that they would be driving home early that morning to attend an event for another organization. The morning of the retreat, two groups of New men and Old men informed the leadership that they would be leaving early. The leadership ensured that the drivers of these two vehicles had not consumed any alcohol and were alert. Unfortunately, the leadership did not check to ensure that all passengers of those vehicles were wearing seatbelts. The fateful decision of these members to not wear seatbelts that morning haunts us as an organization; we want to make sure others do not make that same mistake.

Separate from the accident, there were some activities perpetuated by a few individuals that did not reflect the organization which we strive to be. Those who participated in these events have been suspended or expelled from the Texas Cowboys following a unanimous vote from our judiciary board, comprised of both students and alumni.

As foreman of the Texas Cowboys, I can confidently say that we are all ashamed of the way that some of our members acted on the night of our fall retreat. It did not align with the standards of our organization, the standards of this University, and most importantly, the standards we set for ourselves as brothers who care for one another.

Nicky's accident has stunned us. It has changed us as individuals and as an organization. We cannot begin to understand the pain the Cumberland family is feeling in the wake of this tragedy. As we have done since the day of the accident, we will continue to support them in any way we can. A number of our members who were directly involved in the accident have taken leadership roles within our organization to ensure that Texas Cowboys remains a safe community, and that we do our part to continue making The University a safe place for all to attend.

Since the inception of the Texas Cowboys in 1922, we have always sought to uphold the ideals of this University, which we all love. Of these ideals, the one which we have held most dear is our obligation to service. Not only to serve our community, but also to serve each other. As an organization, we plan to enact a campus-wide campaign in order to educate students on the importance of wearing seatbelts and practicing safe driving. Additionally, we plan to take an active role as leaders on campus to abolish hazing. We hope to work closely with the BeVocal Bystander Intervention Initiative in order to encourage other organizations across campus to end hazing practices.

It has always been our goal to act as role models within our community. We believe this aspiration matters now more than ever. For the last 97 years, Texas Cowboys has worked to improve the UT Austin community and we hope to continue this tradition.

When the student organization was told that our judiciary board would be launching an investigation into the events of our fall retreat, we agreed not to adopt a “code of silence.” Our members have been upfront and truthful about the events that occurred that night throughout both the third-party investigation, as well as The University’s investigation. We will continue to aid The University in their investigation and wait patiently for their decision. Until that time, the Texas Cowboys plan to continue living our motto “Give the best you have to Texas,” while striving to live each day in a way which would make Nicky proud.

William Furst is the Foreman (President) of the Texas Cowboys, an honorary men’s service organization at The University of Texas at Austin.